

Middlesex University Research Repository

An open access repository of

Middlesex University research

<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk>

Siebert, Sabina and Costley, Carol ORCID logo [ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7996-8908](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7996-8908)
(2013) Conflicting values in reflection on professional practice. Higher Education, Skills and
Work-based Learning, 3 (3) . pp. 156-167. ISSN 2042-3896 [Article]
(doi:10.1108/HESWBL-07-2011-0032)

Final accepted version (with author's formatting)

This version is available at: <https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/12649/>

Copyright:

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this work are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge.

Works, including theses and research projects, may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from them, or their content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). They may not be sold or exploited commercially in any format or medium without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Full bibliographic details must be given when referring to, or quoting from full items including the author's name, the title of the work, publication details where relevant (place, publisher, date), pagination, and for theses or dissertations the awarding institution, the degree type awarded, and the date of the award.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address:

eprints@mdx.ac.uk

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

See also repository copyright: re-use policy: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/policies.html#copy>

Conflicting values in reflection on professional practice

Sabina Siebert, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK, and

Carol Costley, Middlesex University, London, UK

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of reflection as a tool of enquiry within the context of higher education work based learning. The aim of the study is to investigate how reflection on professional practice brings about a review of the values underpinning that practice.

Design/methodology/approach – The data were collected from a group of undergraduate students undertaking their studies by work based learning in the area of management in a Scottish University. An open-ended questionnaire was designed to learn about the participants' views on their perceived freedom to reflect on their workplace practice in the university, their ability to challenge the organizational values and established practices in the workplace, and on their relationship with the workplace mentor.

Findings – Students on work based learning programmes are subjected to demands from at least three directions: first, their own expectations, in terms of both what they want to achieve by way of their own development, second, the needs of their organization; and third, expectations of the university in ensuring that the work produced meets the standard for an academic award. These interests can sometimes coincide, but they can also conflict, and such a conflict can reveal tensions that run deeper into the culture of the organization.

Research limitations/implications – This study is based on a relatively small sample of learners in one university, hence the findings are of preliminary nature. Despite the small sample size, the conclusions are indicative of a potential problem in the design of work based learning, and a larger cross-institutional study would allow the validity of these results to be verified.

Practical implications – The findings emerging from this study have implications for the facilitators of work based learning in higher education. Although university work based learning programmes differ significantly from corporate learning and development efforts, this paper suggests that work based learning providers should co-operate more closely with the learners' employing organizations towards creating an environment for learning at work. More co-operation between the university and the employer might be more beneficial for all stakeholders.

Originality/value – The literature on work based learning focuses in the main on the use of reflection as a tool of enquiry into workplace practice. Drawing on the study of contemporary work organizations, this paper explores the tensions arising from reflection on the learners' practice, and possible conflict of values that reflection exposes.

Keywords Professional practice, Reflection, Work based learning, Organizational practices, Corporate learning, HE management programmes, Employees, Personal and professional development.

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Many higher education institutions have a tradition of engaging with workplaces, either through programmes designed to contribute to the continuing professional development of individuals, or through delivery of customized programmes in the workplace. In the last two or three decades this kind of activity has developed to include what is sometimes known as negotiated work based learning, where the focus of learning is more individual in nature and the university takes on a role that is more concerned with facilitation and assessment than delivery (Boud and Solomon, 2001). This type of learning can involve technical elements or it can be more purely contextually based (for instance in being built around real-world problems faced by learners and their organizations), but it is generally characterized by a transdisciplinary way of thinking that foregrounds real-life matters and subjects them to critical exploration and analysis (Lester and Costley, 2010). Within this kind of work based learning, students are subjected to demands from at least three directions: their own, in terms of both what they want to achieve by way of their own development, and their interpretations and perspectives on their professional contexts; those of their organization or business (including for some the specific agenda of their manager); and those of the university in ensuring that the work produced meets the standard for an academic award. These interests can sometimes coincide, but they can also conflict, and such a conflict can reveal tensions that run deeper into the culture of the organization.

This preliminary study is set within the context of work based learning at the higher education level, and concerns the use of reflection on management programmes. One of the tools of inquiry used in work based learning is reflective practice. The use of reflection on practice as one of the tools of enquiry has stimulated considerable debate in the literature on workplace learning (Boud and Walker, 2002; Walsh, 2009; Costley, 2000). Originally introduced by Schön, this approach to professional practice emphasizes the importance of professional practice, and recognizes “the

intelligence inherent in skilful action” (Kinsella, 2007, p. 407). However, reflection is often understood by their managers as solely a self-assessment tool. Jeffrey and McCrea (2004) describe this kind of tension as a conflict between managerialism and professionalism, and suggest that it may lead to a clash between the values of the worker/learner and those of the organization. Work based learning students are often required to reflect critically on work practices using reflection as a means of enquiry, and as a way to develop themselves and their organizations with a view to improving practice. The aim of our paper is to investigate how within the context of work-based studies reflection on professional practice brings about a review of the values underpinning that practice. The paper explores various aspects of the conflict of organizational values and its impact on learning at work.

Background

The literature indicates that discussions of organizational culture and values are part of the discourse of management, and are frequently used as a framework for discussions on learning at work. Individuals in the workplace operate within a context, and this context impacts on their behaviour, and shapes their value systems (Schon, 1983; Ghaye and Lillyman, 2010; Johns, 2006). Work based learning is strongly embedded in the organizational context, and it is advisable that facilitators of work based learning programmes do not lose sight of the organizational culture in which the learners operate as employees. One of the features of working in an organization is internal conflict, and regardless of the way conflict is approached and dealt with, its existence cannot be denied. Schon (1987) acknowledges the inevitability of conflict in organizations, explaining that depending on our disciplinary backgrounds, past histories and organizational roles, individuals frame problematic situations in different ways, pay attention to different facts and interpret these facts differently. The managerialist perspective on organizations, however, does not consider conflict as desirable. The studies of power and politics in organizations distinguish

Conflicting values in reflection between power and authority. Managerial authority is seen as legitimate, and the managerialist perspective on organizations assumes that such authority is key to the achievement of organizational goals (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2010). Managerialism

also assumes that power in organizations is embedded in organizational culture, practices and structures, and that non-managerial power is illegitimate (Drory and Romm, 1994). This approach has implications for learning in organizations, as any potential attempts to challenge the authority of management will be perceived as disruptive and potentially damaging.

Tensions within organizational learning are further exacerbated by the inherent conflict between bureaucracy and professionalism (Schon, 1983, p. 337). Shafer et al. (2002, p. 50) refer to this type of conflict as organizational-professional conflict. Power in an organization comes from a multiplicity of sources, and the level of bureaucracy will determine the level of professional autonomy. Shafer et al. (2002) suggest that organizational-professional conflict is found to contribute to dysfunctional work outcomes, such as a lower level of organizational commitment and higher turnover intentions. They further note that as professionals employed in organizations move up the hierarchy of an organization, they show greater concern for organizational values and less concern for professional values. On the basis of their assumption that organizational and professional values and norms are inherently incompatible, Aranya and Ferris (1984, p. 1) argue that the relationship between organizations and their professional employees is often conflicted.

More recently, Gustavs and Clegg (2005) noted that these tensions in organizations, discussed by Schon and other commentators in the 1980s, are linked with the issues related to work based learning. Gustavs and Clegg's (2005) study focuses on three parties – the university, the workplace manager and the learner who undertakes a critical enquiry into their work practice. Such an enquiry is a social practice and in the discourse of higher education it is seen as an attempt to provide learners with the ways to explore critically the relationship between their work and identity. The

analysis reveals that an assumption that the goals of all three parties, the student, the organization and the university, are congruent, is flawed, and the authors find that the key factor in determining success or failure of work based learning is the people themselves: “recalcitrant coaches, troubled learners and uncommitted academics” (Gustavs and Clegg, 2005, p. 27). It is not in the managers’ interest to support colleagues in their pursuit of knowledge, as the managers do not uncritically accept the rhetoric of the knowledge economy. The learners, in turn, quickly see through the strategic game playing involved in the managers’ approach, and respond to the subtle pressures exerted upon them by themselves becoming game players. Academics, on the other hand, appear to lack commitment to the idea of the workplace as a site of Mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons et al., 1994). The issues discussed in their study resonate with the findings from our research which focuses on the use of reflection in work based learning, and in particular on the possible tensions between an individual’s autonomy and management control in learning at work.

Reflection on workplace practice

One of the tools of inquiry used in work based learning and work-based research is reflective practice. Reflection, as an approach to learning enables the practitioner to challenge assumptions about practice and thus encourages a worker to question the values underpinning practice. Reflective learning undertaken through education courses usually relies on the provision of a framework that helps the learner to make sense of experience, and this in turn allows them to learn from experience. Reflective practice can help an individual develop knowledge and skills, build confidence and plan their personal development. The development of reflective practitioners is underpinned by an ability to question the old ways and suggest new ways of working (Higgins, 2011). However, this kind of reflective practice is not unproblematic, as it requires a search for meaning and constant questioning of the values that underpin practice (Jeffrey and McCrea, 2004). Practitioners who reflect on their practice through an educated, critical lens are bound to question the definition of the task, the elements

of organizational knowledge and structure. Such reflection-in-action is essential to the process of organizational learning, and it is, at the same time, a threat to organizational stability (Schon, 1983).

The growing literature on reflection indicates that there is a shift in organizations from reflection on values underpinning practice to a situation where reflection is often understood as a self-assessment tool. Edwards and Usher (1994) consider this a part of a culture of managerialism. There is evidence that managers allow workers to be critically reflective instead of letting them question dominant organizational ideas (Garrick and Rhodes, 1998). Reflection is becoming attractive to management in some organizations as it can be effectively used as part of employees' performance appraisal. Such an approach can destroy trust between management and practitioners, and as Jeffrey and McCrea (2004) suggest, it can lead to a shift in the meaning of professionalism.

From this perspective, reflection may be seen as a method of increasing productivity and efficiency, and facilitating surveillance through self-surveillance (Jeffrey and McCrea, 2004). The incorporation of reflection into the process of an individual's performance appraisal makes it possible for organizations to set a "good" example and propagate "good" practice. Such an approach is based on a normative order – the decision of what is "good" and "bad" is within the management prerogative. It is almost always the management who decide what constitutes a good example and good practice, and impose the normative order. Reflective learning, or double loop learning, as advocated by Argyris and Schon (1978), however, requires questioning of the assumptions, leaving room for new multiple interpretations of the organizational reality. Similarly, reflexivity, linked to reflection, often leads to "examining critically the assumptions underlying our actions, the impact of those actions, and from a broader perspective, what passes as good management practice" (Cunliffe, 2004, p. 407). Cunliffe (2004) says: "Critically reflexive practice embraces subjective understandings of reality as a basis for thinking more critically about the impact of our

assumptions, values, and actions on others” (p. 407).

Arguably, the most contested aspect of reflection in higher education is assessment (see e.g. Hobbs, 2007). By evaluating their own practice and achievement, worker/learners are exposing themselves to the scrutiny of others, and this may affect the authenticity of reflection. Reflective writing is known to generate feelings of discomfort and vulnerability (Ghaye, 2007), as it encourages the reflector to critically analyse organizational contexts which do not always welcome critical practice (Morley, 2007). Not many organizations are capable of “double-loop learning” (Argyris and Schon, 1978) which requires questioning of norms and values underpinning practice. The relationship between emotion and learning in organizations has been examined by a number of critics (Antonacopoulou, 2004; Beirne, 2006; Beirne and Knight, 2007; Reynolds, 1998; Reynolds and Vince, 2004). For example, Vince and Saleem (2004) explore how emotional and political aspects of organizational life can throw light on Conflicting values in reflection the tensions between individual and organizational learning, and argue that the repeated patterns of caution and blame inhibit the process of reflection amongst employees. Vince (2010) elsewhere notes that attempts to bring critical approaches into management education can provoke anxiety in learners.

A problematic aspect of reflection in work based learning is the conflict between the values of the individual and those of the organization. Gerber (1998) emphasizes the importance of personal values and their contribution to learning at work. Values which contribute to workers’ learning, in light of Gerber’s study, include using one’s own initiative, acting responsibly, setting a good example and standing up for one’s beliefs. However, if values are assessed through the scrutiny of reflective portfolios, the learner is left vulnerable. Worker/learners may fear being penalized for exposing a radical set of beliefs to the scrutiny of university assessors, a professional body or employers (Jeffrey and McCrea, 2004). The discrepancy between “personal” and “safe” responses (Ghaye, 2007), mirrors the discrepancy between the organization’s policy and the reflective practitioner, mainly due to the fact that it highlights disparities

between a practitioner's espoused theories and their actual practice (Morley, 2007).

Methodology

Drawing on the literature on reflection and perspectives on contemporary work organizations we have conducted an empirical study to explore the more problematic aspects of reflection in work based learning. The empirical data discussed in this paper was collected from students in a Scottish University.

The students were surveyed with a view to investigating various aspects of reflection in the context of work based learning. A questionnaire was designed drawing on the key concepts and issues emerging from the literature on reflection in work based learning. The questionnaire contained nine open-ended questions about the participants' views on their perceived freedom to reflect on their workplace practice in the university, their ability to challenge the organizational values and established practices in the workplace, on potential consequences of their critical evaluations of managers, and on their relationship with the workplace mentor. The participants were also asked to comment on their ability to use IT in the workplace for the purpose of learning and coursework preparation. Since the class-room activities involved reflection and discussion on workplace practice with others on the course, the participants were asked whether they felt they could freely engage in such discussions. The themes emerging from the questionnaire were analysed to thematically in order to establish patterns in participants' views and attitudes to reflection at work. The questionnaire was also used to identify the main barriers to reflective learning emerging from students' accounts of their work based learning study. The open-ended nature of the questions, and great amount of time available for completion of the questionnaire meant that we received reasonably lengthy answers, in some cases short essay-like narratives.

A group of 14 undergraduate students were invited to take part in this research. All of them undertook their studies through work based learning in the area of

management, focusing specifically on human resource management, quality management, change management and organizational studies. A pre-requisite to further study was a module in personal and professional development and a key element of this module was reflective learning. In the module the students discussed the main theories underpinning reflective practice both in the context of higher education and in an organization, explored the role of reflection in professional development and reflected on their learning to date. This module is fundamental to the structuring of programmes and encourages the students to evaluate their own professional practice, become more aware of their own preconceptions and assumptions, gain a better understanding of ethics, and integrate theory and practice. As part of these modules, students are required to produce personal and professional development plans, and/or analyse and evaluate aspects of their current professional practice. The assessment in the module is based on a critical incident analysis in the context of the workplace, and a professional development plan preceded by a piece of reflective writing on workplace learning.

All participants could be classed as mature students (over 21 years old) and they were self-employed or in full-time or part-time employment. The group was diverse in terms of their professional backgrounds and comprised managers from the health service, bank managers, teaching assistants, managers in small and medium enterprises, a local authority council manager, a police officer, a further education lecturer and one self-employed businessman.

Findings

The data collected indicates that for many organizations, discussions on organizational values were not always welcome. Several responses indicated that it was normally senior managers who “ran the show”, “did not welcome criticism” and introduced rules which were to be obeyed, not questioned. Reflective accounts which may be perceived as critical of the dominant strategy, were not always encouraged, as the

following quotes indicate:

Reflective practice could include comments about the workplace that may not be well received by the person's supervisor/manager thus creating a detrimental effect on the person's position in the workplace.

There is no mechanism to change ways of working as new ideas have to go via the senior management route, and must meet business needs.

Reflection may show up ineffective managerial direction.

Reflection benefits company, not individuals, as [individuals'] goals will be aligned with company objectives. Reflection leads to exposure of poor practice, construed as a challenge to authority.

One student noted that what is expected of her is “blind adherence to party dogma” which discourages openness. A voluntary sector worker who took part in our study questioned the real value of the “learning organization” which her employer purported to be. In her view, reflective learning was discouraged and was seen as criticism of management. Another student commented on the problems he faced in his role of trade union health and safety officer and a lack of support for his training in this area. Reflection on his effectiveness as a health and safety officer was explicitly discouraged, as this was not seen as his primary role in the organization:

Difficulties can arise when the staff member requests training that does not relate to that role. This can result in conflict. [y] In a small organization it is difficult to provide opportunities for promotion. There is a risk that staff are given training and then move to other organizations.

Two respondents suggested that being critical of current practices made them vulnerable, stigmatized them as troublemakers and could potentially be detrimental to career prospects:

As it is a personal reflection can contain a person's weaknesses then it could be said to leave a person vulnerable as the information could be used against them.

It [reflection] is a skill that may not be achievable by all employees and it could show them up in a bad way.

Our respondents suggested that critical reflection could not only be viewed as criticism of management, but also as an admission of an employee's inadequacy resulting in low morale:

It can create anxiety about personal ability. [y] If your competence levels do not meet management or industry expectation [y] it may result in low morale within the individual and spread to the team. Post-delivery reflection can be seen as a rush to find the guilty in the event of an unsuccessful project. Failure is an orphan after all [y].

A few students commented explicitly on the clash of values of the individual and the organization, and indicated that in the context of work based learning reflection on practice may make them liable to punitive action, especially in the context of annual performance review with their manager. Reflecting on shortcomings appears to lead to discomfort and vulnerability, whereas reporting success boosts confidence and self-esteem. This aspect of reflection creates a feeling of mistrust:

Performance shortfalls or other negatives may not be able to be improved upon by the individual. [y] If mistakes have been made, then staff may feel it is a punitive exercise.

No significant differences could be observed between the specific organizations, for example, whether they were public or private sector, or whether they were large or small. Understandably, the discussion on organizational values, and potential conflict emerging from a clash of values, were not echoed in the self-employed respondent's comments.

Our data indicates that sometimes this reluctance to engage in dialogue with colleagues in the workplace affects the student-mentor relationship. Nine respondents said that they avoided discussing their coursework with their workplace mentors. Three added that this decision was motivated by fear of negative repercussions. Some students saw the benefits of discussing the coursework with their managers, and felt free to do so. However, not all employers had access to students' coursework and practices in this respect varied across the group. The university has a policy of not informing the employing organizations on student's progress and not discussing students' coursework with them. In some cases, however, students chose to submit

their work to their employers, or discuss it with managers prior to submission to the university. When asked whether the employer's access determined the content of coursework (including reflective writing), the majority of students claimed that they were "conservative" in what they wrote, and had to be guarded in expressing their views.

Only four students claimed that they enjoyed the freedom to discuss organizational values and contribute to the formation of policy at work. These students expressed a view that honesty is seen as important, and that their organizations were able to embrace a range of values which could be equally correct and at the same time oppositional. They noted that if the organizational climate is conducive to openness, reflection can be beneficial to both an individual, and the organization:

Reflecting on a piece of work identifies what worked well and the reasons for that. It enables good practice to be replicated. [Reflection] encourages employees to slow down, step back and think. [Reflection] creates an environment where staff feel able to share experience.

These students appeared to have trust in their managers, and such trust is central to the concept of reflection. Boud and Walker (2002) observe that reflection requires a level of trust appropriate to the level of disclosure, and that confidentiality needs to be respected. The empirical evidence collected here suggests it is the lack of trust in the workplace that sometimes hinders learning from reflection, and leads to what Gustavs and Clegg (2005) refer to as game playing, for example, avoiding overt criticism of the organization. One respondent said that "too much managerial involvement can hamper the process of reflection". This "feeling of mistrust", mentioned earlier affects honesty with which students/workers treat their reflection:

Being honest in reflective accounts is imperative – it may not always be wise in to be honest in the workplace depending who may read the account.

However, it was noted that it is ultimately the learner's decision what to include and what to exclude from a reflective account, but the organizational climate to a great extent will impact on this decision.

An issue which was raised in a number of survey responses related to the access to the virtual learning environment in the reflective practice module. The use of virtual learning environments and social knowledge spaces is valued as these modalities facilitate interaction among stakeholders. Aware of the importance of dialogue in a virtual learning group, our respondents appeared keen to learn from each other and exchange experiences from their own professional contexts. Unfortunately, some of them appeared to be constrained by mistrust of the electronic medium, and concerns about a lack of confidentiality of the views expressed. Our data indicated that a conflict of values resulting from reflection on work practice impacts on the learner's willingness to use technology. When asked to reflect on their everyday practice, assumptions behind it, values of the organization and their own values, learners either opted out of participating in online discussions, or expressed their objections against this medium for fear of surveillance on the part of the employer. Concerns expressed by work-based learners included the employer's right of access to the Virtual Learning Environment, a risk of disclosing commercial secrets and a reluctance to expose shortcomings of practice. Two students raised an issue of the use of work IT systems in the process of study. The employer's right to monitor e-mail and internet access was seen as a risk to students' autonomy in their studies.

The empirical data in this study and our experience as work based learning facilitators also indicate that legal issues are not uncommon in reflection on workplace practices. Writing about professional practice may give rise to a number of ethical issues and, as Ghaye (2007) warns, may lead to situations of whistle-blowing and even actions for defamation against employees. Public sector employees participating in the study were less concerned about commercial sensitivities regarding reflection on workplace practice, while private sector managers showed particular unwillingness to reflect and comment on various aspects of their organizations' human resource management practices such as performance management, reward and conflict resolution.

Discussion

Although the specific focus of this study is the role of reflection, the findings presented here are indicative of wider problems that work-based learners and facilitators face.

The rhetoric of the notions of learning organization, knowledge worker and knowledge economy is sometimes divorced from the organizational practice. This disparity leads to tension between the values of the employees and those of the organizations, and between the individual's professionalism and the managerialism of organizations.

The university's aspiration is to encourage critical analysis and learner's reflexivity, and arguably, as Gustavs and Clegg (2005) claim, the performativity of work-based learning in collaboration with the university, the actual real effectiveness contemplated for the practice in the discourse of higher education, is to challenge the values and the ways people work. Our study indicates that organizations are not always interested in promoting critical reflection and challenging of values. This disparity is evident in the managers' emphasis on "bottom line" and "commercial sensitivity", and success in learning is sometimes "measured" by immediate improvements in productivity.

Reflection may also become the locus of conflict between individuals' professionalism and the expectations of the organization. Management in organizations may sometimes treat reflection as a form of self-assessment, rather than as a transformative process, and although organizational change features strongly in formal policies, challenging of existing practices by employees is not always welcome.

Unlike mainstream management education at the university, which does not always encourage reflection on the emotions and politics generated within management practice (Vince, 2010, p. 28), work based learning makes worker/learners more aware of and subjected to the issues of power in organization (Siebert and Mills, 2007). In work based learning the focus is on students subjecting their own values to evaluation, but it is crucial that university courses acknowledge the tensions arising from students being located within the context of their organizations. Organizations could work more closely with universities and facilitate the process of reflective learning in a more pluralistic way that allows for a possible conflict of values. Extending reflective

conversations among stakeholders can enhance human, structural and social capital for the learner, the university and the organization. However, what is problematic is the potential consequences of such an approach for the individual. We found that many organizations were not prepared to open up their values for discussion and did not welcome conversations on current practice with other employees.

In their discussion of the three-way interaction in work based learning Critten and Moteleb (2007) refer to the employing organization as a “sleeping partner”. This study appears to suggest that even if the organization appears to be passive, its role as a power holder cannot be underestimated. The organization may restrict the opportunities for critical reflection on practice. The analysis of data collected here indicates that reflection on practice built into work based learning programmes is particularly problematic. On the one hand, higher education encourages critical thinking, but on the other hand, the organization may discourage attempts to question the existing order of things. The situation may lead to conflict between the personal development of a professional and the business objectives of an organization. This study indicates that organizations which create cultures that welcome both single and double loop learning can create an atmosphere of openness and honesty which, if managed effectively, should be beneficial to the organization. Organizations could approach this opportunity using a deconstructive approach to organizational learning where established truths are challenged, new interpretations become possible and individuals feel comfortable to challenge dominant power structures. As Grey (2004) suggests “management is not about neutral techniques but about values” (p. 180). In order to reduce the effects of the conflict of values, it may be beneficial for organizations to create a work environment that is supportive of professional values, for example, by promoting professional autonomy and minimizing demands which may violate professional standards. All of these recommendations relate to a pluralist perspective on organizational learning, and concern mainly the way the employing organization manages employees. By encouraging the worker/learners to engage in their reflexive questioning and create possibilities for change (Cunliffe, 2004), we

should be cognizant of bureaucratic organizations that may resist a professional's desire to be both technically expert and reflectively wise.

Conclusion

Reflection is a powerful tool which can be used to empower practitioners and enable them to construct problems differently. If we believe that engagement in reflective learning is a transformative experience, the outcomes of the experience will rarely be predictable. By encouraging critical approaches to work practice, work-based learning facilitators can be more sensitive to the organizational cultures within which students operate. They should be more aware of the normative order imposed by some managers and the organizational values to which the worker/learners are often obliged to subscribe. Conflict of values is in some cases unavoidable, but work based learning providers can help students capitalize on these conflicts and help them learn from the tensions arising in the course of study.

On a positive note, the espoused mission of universities is to equip individuals with the tools of critical appraisal, evaluation and analysis. Consequently, the type of learning promoted within the university differs significantly from corporate efforts. Designed in conjunction with employers, university work based learning programmes meet both the broad and specific educational needs of employees whilst acknowledging the staff development objectives of an employer. Unlike employer-led CPD programmes, work based learning in higher education is intended to provide the worker/learner with a broader framework for fulfilment of career aspirations. This often means equipping them with skills to appraise assumptions, draw conclusions and challenge corporate policies. The rhetoric of corporate learning and development strategies usually welcomes such skills, but for this ambition to be fulfilled, the organizations need to be able to open up their values for discussion by reflective and critical employees. Facilitators of work based learning in higher education are not normally in a position to influence an organization; however, there is still room for far greater co-operation between higher education and organizations towards creating an environment for learning at work that has the propensity to be beneficial for both

learners and organizations.

It has to be remembered that this study is based on a relatively small sample of learners in one university, hence the findings are of preliminary nature. Despite the small sample size, the conclusions are indicative of a potential problem in the design of work based learning, and a larger cross-institutional study would allow the validity of these results to be verified.

References

- Antonacopoulou, E.P. (2004), "The limits and consequences of experience absent reflection: implications for learning and organizing", in Reynolds, M. and Vince, R. (Eds), *Organizing Reflection*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 47-64.
- Aranya, N. and Ferris, K.R. (1984), "A re-examination of accountants organizational-professional conflict", *The Accounting Review*, Vol. 59 No. 1, pp. 1-15.
- Argyris, C. and Schön, D.A. (1978), *Organizational Learning: A Theory in Action Perspective*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Beirne, M. (2006), *Empowerment and Innovation: Managers, Principles and Reflective Practice*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham.
- Beirne, M. and Knight, S. (2007), "From community theatre to critical management studies: a dramatic contribution to reflective learning?", *Management Learning*, Vol. 38 No. 5, pp. 591-611.
- Boud, D. and Solomon, N. (Eds) (2001), *Work based learning: A New Higher Education? Society for Research in Higher Education and Open University Press*, Buckingham.
- Boud, D. and Walker, D. (2002), "Promoting reflection in professional courses", in Harrison, R., Reeve, F., Hanson, A. and Clarke, J. (Eds), *Supporting Lifelong Learning: Perspectives on Learning*, Routledge Falmer/Open University Press, London, pp. 91-110.
- Buchanan, D. and Huczynski, A. (2010), *Organizational Behaviour*, 7th ed., FT Prentice Hall, London.
- Costley, C. (2000), "The boundaries and frontiers of knowledge", in Portwood, D. and Costley, C. (Eds), *Work based learning and The University: New Perspectives and Practices*, SEDA,

Birmingham, pp. 23-34.

Critten, P. and Moteleb, A. (2007), "Towards a second generation work based learning – supporting social knowledge", in Young, D. and Garnett, J. (Eds), *Work based learning Futures*, University Vocational Awards Council, Bolton.

Cunliffe, A. (2004), "On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner", *Journal of Management Education*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 407-426.

Drory, A. and Romm, T. (1994), "The definition of organizational politics: a review", *Human Relations*, Vol. 43 No. 11, pp. 1133-1154.

Edwards, R. and Usher, R. (1994), "Disciplining the subject: the power of competence", *Studies in the Education of Adults*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 1-14.

Garrick, J. and Rhodes, C. (1998), "Deconstructive organizational learning: the possibilities for a post modern epistemology of practice", *Studies in the Education of Adults*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 172-183.

Gerber, R. (1998), "How do workers learn in their work?", *The Learning Organization*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 168-175.

Ghaye, T. (2007), "Editorial: is reflective practice ethical? (The case of reflective portfolio)", *Reflective Practice*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 151-162.

Ghaye, T. and Lillyman, S. (2010), *Reflection: Principles and Practices for Healthcare Professionals*, Quay Books, London.

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P. and Trow, M. (1994), *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, Sage, London.

Grey, C. (2004), "Reinventing business schools: the contribution of critical management education", *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 178-186.

Gustavs, J. and Clegg, S. (2005), "Working the knowledge game? Universities and corporate organizations in partnership", *Management Learning*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 9-30.

Higgins, D. (2011), "Why reflect?", *Recognising the Link Between Learning and Reflection*, *Reflective Practice*, Vol. 12 No. 5, pp. 583-584.

Hobbs, V. (2007), "Faking it or hating it: can reflective practice be forced?", *Journal of Reflective Practice*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 405-417.

Jeffrey, G. and McCrea, M. (2004), "Are your managers your main clients? Reflective practice, the critical self and learning organizations", in Reid, H. and Bimrose, J. (Eds), *Constructing the Future: Reflection on Practice*, Institute of Career Guidance, Stourbridge.

Johns, C. (2006), *Engaging Reflection in Practice: A Narrative Approach*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Kinsella, E.A. (2007), "Embodies reflection and the epistemology of reflective practice", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 395-409.

Lester, S. and Costley, C. (2010), "Work based learning at higher education level: value, practice and critique", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 35 No. 5, pp. 561-575.

Morley, C. (2007), "Engaging practitioners with critical reflection: issues and dilemmas", *Reflective Practice*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 61-74.

Reynolds, P.M. (1998), "Reflection and critical reflection in management learning", *Management Learning*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 183-200.

Reynolds, M. and Vince, R. (2004), "Organizing reflection: an introduction", in Reynolds, M. and Vince, R. (Eds), *Organizing Reflection*, Aldershot, Ashgate, pp. 1-14.

Schoen, D. (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot.

Schoen, D. (1987), *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey-Bass Inc, San Francisco, CA.

Shafer, W., Park, L.J. and Liao, W.M. (2002), "Professionalism, organizational-professional conflict and work outcomes: a study of certified management accountants", *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 46-68.

Siebert, S. and Mills, V. (2007), "The quest for autonomy: a Foucauldian perspective on workbased research", *Journal of Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 309-317.

Vince, R. (2010), "Anxiety, politics and critical management education", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 26-39.

Vince, R. and Saleem, T. (2004), "The impact of caution and blame on organizational learning", *Management Learning*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 133-154.

Walsh, A. (2009), "Modes of reflection: is it possible to use both individual and collective reflection to reconcile the 'three party knowledge interests' in workplace learning?", *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 44 No. 3, pp. 385-398.